

THE PROBLEM

Scott Paper Company 10022

Scott Paper Company broke ground for its new Dover, Delaware, plant in May, 1972. The new plant had been designed to produce a new product, using a highly proprietary manufacturing process and an innovative work team system developed specifically for the new plant. For competitive reasons, Scott had disclosed very little detailed information about the new plant since the groundbreaking ceremony. Consequently, as construction neared completion in June, 1973, the predominantly blue-collar community of less than 18,000 people were uncertain about the number of job openings and what kinds of jobs would be available.

Although Scott would be the fifth nationally known employer in Dover, the Company would employ far fewer people than the other four companies. Published estimates ranged from 400 to 100 new hires. Initially, however, Scott planned to hire only 12 employees and gradually employ 100 by the end of the first year of operation. Furthermore, the selection system developed to hire new employees was unlike anything with which prospective applicants were familiar.

Under the work team system, all employees would work in teams and would actively participate in the operation of the plant. The system would be based on the tenets of job enrichment and industrial democracy, concepts popularized in recent years in the United States and Europe.

Scott wanted to devise a local communications program which would have high impact on the community, without attracting too much national attention to any aspect of the Dover operation. The Company wanted to get the plant underway and to secure its competitive position before encouraging national publicity.

On the local community level, Scott was concerned that (1) the advantages of the work team system would be obscured by the potential resentment created by its inability to talk about all aspects of the new plant; (2) community expectations which exceeded the number of job openings, and (3) reaction by prospective applicants to the uncommon selection system.

The Philadelphia Consulting Office of Towers, Perrin, Forster & Crosby, Inc., international consultants to management, was retained by Scott to assist in developing an employee selection system and a community relations program to announce and explain the system to the Dover community. The program was to be conducted over an eight-to-ten week period starting in May, 1973.

COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

In view of the potential for misunderstanding and adverse public opinion, TPF/C proposed a communications program designed to achieve these objectives:

- Engender a receptive, cooperative attitude toward Scott among all segments of the community.
- Realign community expectation to conform with Scott's manpower plans.
- Establish adequate levels of understanding about the employee selection system and the work team system among the general public and special interest groups, i. e., organized labor, neighboring employers, governmental agencies, and minority groups.
- Maximize the effectiveness of the employee selection system by pre-screening prospective applicants.

METHOD

To achieve the program objectives, we gathered data on the salient socio-economic characteristics of Dover, such as unemployment rate, comparative pay and benefits, ethnic composition, and centers-of-influence. We also assessed the community's attitude toward Scott since the groundbreaking, and conducted an audit of local media to estimate the effectiveness of a short-term saturation campaign limited to the Dover area. Finally, we prepared a recommended budget.

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1. Press release announcing Scott Dover staff assignments.
2. Meetings with the local Chamber of Commerce and executives of neighboring companies to explain the uniqueness of Scott's Dover plant.
3. Newspaper advertisements explaining the selection system and listing the place, dates and times of public meetings to explain the reasons for the employee selection procedure developed for Scott's Dover plant.
4. Radio announcements complimenting the newspaper advertisements to focus attention on the series of public meetings.
5. Personal contacts with the local newspaper editor and the radio news directors to give them background on the new plant and Scott's announcement plans.
6. Two prints of an NBC documentary film titled "Humanizing Work" were purchased and shown by Scott personnel at several meetings with local business and community leaders as well as at the public meetings.
7. A series of public meetings, which included the film, a presentation on wages, benefits and working conditions. There was also ample time for people to ask questions.
8. A brochure describing the work system was distributed to everyone who attended the public meetings. Employment forms were also available for those who wanted them.
9. A follow-up advertisement in a special business edition of the local newspaper thanked the community for its cordiality and responsiveness to the invitation to attend the public meetings.
10. An article by the plant manager also appeared in the special business edition of the newspaper.
11. Personalized letters thanking them for their interest and advising them of their status as applicants were sent to all those who submitted applications.
12. A personal letter from the Human Resource Manager and a gift box of Scott paper products were sent to the families of those who successfully completed the selection process and were hired.

RESULTS

At the conclusion of the program, all objectives had been achieved.

- Over 1,500 area residents attended the series of public meetings.
- Approximately 500 of those who attended the public meetings applied for the 12 immediate plant openings.
- The majority of applicants met the selection criteria.
- The Scott staff received many compliments about the program from community leaders and members of the general public.
- The local news media, which had been frustrated by Scott's unwillingness to disclose details about the plant, was supportive and enthusiastic in its reporting and commentary.
- Scott was quickly established as a company concerned about providing opportunities for meaningful, satisfying work.

There was no negative reaction from any sector of the community. Through the program described in this binder, Scott was enthusiastically accepted by Dover.